

Burlington Library

HABS-NJ-319

Burlington City, Burlington County, New Jersey

HABS

NJ

3-2084

17-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Scymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Burlington Library  
Burlington City, Burlington County, New Jersey

Owner: Library Company of Burlington

Date of Erection: 1864

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - sandstone

Interior walls - plaster

Roof - pitch

Historical Data:

In November 1757 according to the minutes of the "Library Company of Burlington" several inhabitants of Burlington thinking that a Library Company in the city would be of great benefit formed themselves into a company. They agreed to pay ten shillings per annum in support of a library. On the first of January 1758, John Reading, president of His Majesty's Council, was granted a vote of thanks by the Library Company for endowing them with a charter granted by King George, II.

The freedom of the library was also put at the disposal of John Reading.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors was held in November 1758 in the parlor of Thomas Rodman's house now 446 South High Street. The company agreed to pay him \$5.00 a year for the use of his best room in which they would meet and keep their books. Here the charter was discussed and accepted, and the rules and laws were drawn up. Few amendments have been added since then so that the original rules are still in force. The officers were elected for one year. The seal was made on January 16, 1759; it is the same seal with the exception of the motto that is still used. In 1767 the Company occupied part of Robert Smith's house. From there they moved to their own building on Library Street. The ground had been presented by Governor Bloomfield. This land was given to them in 1788. The sum of fifty pounds was agreed to be paid for a building, which it is thought is the same one now used as a barn. The company remained there until their removal in 1864 to their present building on West Union Street. This property was purchased from Samuel W. Taylor and Elizabeth D., his wife, for the sum of \$1400.00.

The present building was erected largely because of a condition in a bequest left by Mr. Joseph Hunter Sterling. Five thousand dollars was given to the Library Company for the purchase of books with the stipulation that within three years of his decease, a building be erected in a suitable location. The dimensions of the building were stated and the present building conforms to the provisions of his will. It was erected by subscriptions from the citizens in 1864.

The first books of the old library were donated by members. The earliest gift was that of the so-called "pistol-piece" from Ebenezer Large. His request was that this "pistol-piece" be sold and with the amount realized a copy of the best Bible be purchased and placed in the library. Great care was taken in recording every gift; some Chinese figures are mentioned, donations in money, pieces of furniture and the like are all included. The library contains over ten thousand volumes; among them many very valuable pamphlets and papers of early issue.

Bibliography:

Schermerhorn, W. E. A History of Burlington, New Jersey Burlington, Enterprise Publishing Company, 1927

Burlington County court records searched by Betty R. Bishop, Burlington County Office

Walter E. Rutt  
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams  
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.  
District Officer

mw 8/4/27